

Rockford School
Raytown Road
Kansas City
Jackson County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1224

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. MO-1224

ROCKFORD SCHOOL

Location: West side of Raytown Road at its intersection with Longview Road, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

USGS Lees Summit Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 15.372205.4308100.

Present Owner: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District.

Present Occupant/
Use: None. Scheduled to be maintained at its present site.

Significance: The small brick building of Rockford School was built as a one-room schoolhouse. At the time of its construction in 1916, three other similar schools designed by the same architect, J.H. Felt and Company of Kansas City, were erected in the same school district. Three of these four structures, including Rockford School, received identical one-room additions in 1924.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1916, per plaque on structure and school board minutes.
2. Architect: J.H. Felt and Company. John Henry Felt was a self-taught architect who studied architecture while teaching school in Greenfield, Indiana. Mr. Felt established J.H. Felt and Company in St. Joseph, Missouri, but later moved the office to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1906. In 1916, J.H. Felt and Company opened a branch office in Mason City, Iowa, with H.H. Dunham operating that office. In 1927, Felt became the senior partner in the firm Felt, Dunham and Kriehn. Mr. Dunham withdrew in 1936 and the firm became Felt and Kriehn. J.H. Felt died two years later.

Mr. Felt designed numerous church and school buildings in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Iowa. Some of his

best known structures in Kansas City are: First Baptist Church (1924), Wornall Road Baptist Church, and Roanoke Baptist Church.

Other structures designed by Mr. Felt are the College of Emporia Science Building (1913) and Administration Building, Emporia, Kansas; Boone County Courthouse, Columbia, Missouri (1908); Independence, Missouri, Christian Church (1907); Emporia, Kansas, Senior High School (1914); and buildings on the campus of William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

3. Architect of 1924 addition: William H. Sayler and Company. William H. Sayler was a Kansas City, Missouri, architect, at one time senior partner of the firm Sayler and Seddon (1907-1914). After 1914, however, Mr. Sayler practiced on his own. Some examples of Mr. Sayler's work in Kansas City are:

F.O. Hoose Residence (1912)
926 West 34th Street
Fire Station at 24th and Southwest Boulevard
Store/Flat for A.M. Lowe, 3033 Prospect Street
Plans for Swope Park Zoo
Ruskin High School (1931)

Mr. Sayler was president of AIA, Kansas City Chapter, in 1916. Sometime prior to construction of Ruskin High School (1931) he became a senior partner in the firm Owen, Sayler and Payson.

4. Original and subsequent owners:
 - a. Warranty Deed 2/15/1873, recorded 1/19/1874, Book 107, Page 30. W.W. Wright and Mary E., W. to Aaron M. Noland et al, Board of Directors.
 - b. Warranty Deed 11/20/1975, recorded 12/1/1975, Book I-638, Page 784. Consolidated School District No. 1 to U.S.A.
5. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Per the school board minutes 6/24/16: "J.M. Idol was awarded the contract to build Rockford School for \$3221."

"W.P. Matticks was awarded the contract to do the heating and dry closet and gas fittings in the...school...for \$1425."

6. Original plan and construction: The structure was originally built as a one-room brick schoolhouse in 1916. Designed by John Henry Felt, the plans were reviewed by the school board on May 27, 1916. "With the exception of some slight changes in the windows, the plans were approved....It was decided by the board that the foundation walls were to be of native stone and walls to be of hollow tile with brick veneer." A board meeting held a month later recorded that "some slight changes in plans for schools" were discussed, but no specific changes were mentioned. The new structure was insured for \$2800.
7. Alterations and additions: In 1924, a vote of the residents of School District No. 1 approved a proposal to add one room to each of three one-room schoolhouses in the district--Rockford, Union Point, and Hickman Mills. At the May 5, 1924, meeting of the board, William H. Sayler and Company were commissioned as architects for the addition.

Other contracts let at this time were (according to the 6/17/1924 minutes):

- a. D.M. Wall for contractor/builder of addition.
- b. Martin-Welch Hardware and Plumbing Company for installation of heaters in the school.
- c. J.R. Bailey for interior painting.

Other minor alterations to the original structure were:

- a. The original wood-burning stove heating system was changed to gas heat probably when the addition of one more school room was made. A door frame now blocks access to the original furnace. The south end of the main basement area was partitioned off to house the heating system for the school. This could have occurred when the new system was installed or when it was necessary to make use of the basement for more classroom space. The basement has remained virtually unfinished with the exception of painting the stone foundation walls.
- b. The original exterior basement windows on the south wall were blocked when the 1924 addition was made. Two basement window openings were boarded while the third was left to provide access to the unfinished dirt basement under the 1924 addition.

- c. An interior doorway on the east wall of the northwest room of the basement north of the present doorway was closed off. It appears there had once been a wall running east-west with the present door leading into a hallway or south room prior to partitioning of the heating system. In the basement of the Union Point School, a contemporary structure of similar design, this east-west wall still exists.
- d. The cloakroom doors, overhead sliding doors on the south wall of the southwest classroom, have been painted open and are no longer operable.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Rockford School derived its name from the rocky ford which crossed the Little Blue River to the east of the site. The original late nineteenth-century frame building was replaced by the present brick structure in 1916.

In March, 1901, with strong support from many in Hickman Mills, the state legislature passed a progressive enabling act allowing for the consolidation of rural schools, to be effective October, 1901. With this act, two or more school districts were able to consolidate into one district and, by the vote of the people, elect directors and vote bonds to provide additional schools or improvements for their district. In 1902, the formation of the Consolidated District No. 1 was approved and the district board was set up with six directors.

This legislation allowed for the construction of four new elementary schools in 1916 in each of the four original school districts: Union Point, Hickman Mills, Holmes Park and Rockford. On May 13, 1916, a special election was held to consider a proposition to authorize the school board to issue twenty-year bonds for "the erection of school buildings, furnishing, repair of and improvement of school grounds" at all four sites. The proposition passed and Rockford School was built that year. Those serving on the board of directors at this time were: U.R. Holmes, J.A. Ervin, R.D. Hornbuckle, H.N. Ashby, W.H. White and J.B. Colton. (The resignation of U.R. Holmes from the board resulted in the appointment of Harry S. Truman, then a young man just getting involved in Missouri politics, to fill the position. Truman held the position for less than a year and did not appear to be actively involved in the school board affairs).

ROCKFORD SCHOOL
HABS No. MO-1224 (Page 5)

In 1924, the school board approved a proposal to make an addition to three of the four schools: Hickman Mills, Union Point, and Rockford. William H. Sayler and Company were commissioned as architects for this addition. After its construction, grades one through four used the original classroom, or north room, and grades five through eight used the new classroom space, or south room.

Rockford School never increased its size after this 1924 addition, maintaining an enrollment of approximately forty students in grades one through eight during the 1920s and 1930s. After World War II and the construction of a new junior high in the district, Rockford was used for grades one through six.

At the end of the 1950s, Rockford was again changed--this time to a kindergarten with approximately 200 children. With the increased number of children enrolling in the school system during the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, Rockford often opened the northwest basement room for first grade students as well.

In 1965, additional elementary schools were constructed and Rockford was then used solely as a kindergarten. Approximately 100 students attended in two shifts.

Rockford School closed its doors in 1974 when the property was acquired by the Corps of Engineers as part of the Longview Dam and Reservoir project. Because of the historic significance of this property, the Corps of Engineers hopes to maintain this structure in a functional use within their project development plans.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

- a. Deed Books: Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County Courthouse, Independence, Missouri.
- b. Old Views from Jackson County Historical Society were photocopied for HABS records.
- c. Interviews:

Harness, Mildred. Manager of historical records,
Consolidated School District No. 1. July 13, 1978,
and August 16, 1978.

Nesbit, Joseph H. Superintendent of Schools,
Consolidated School District No. 1. July 13, 1978,
and August 16, 1978.

Pennington, Mae. Teacher in school system for six years
and longtime resident of area. August 2, 1978.

Piland, Sherry. Architectural historian, Kansas City
Landmarks Commission. August 4, 1978.

Scott, Gladys. Rockford School alumna whose family was
involved in school district affairs for years.
August 2, 1978.

d. Additional Primary research material:

School Board Minutes, 1907-1933.

Rockford School Annual Record Books--1898, 1903, 1916,
1917, 1924, 1930.

2. Secondary Sources:

Carrington, W.T. History of Education in Missouri.
Autobiography published by author, circa 1932.

Hancks, Larry K. Roots: The Historic and Architectural
Heritage of Kansas City. Kansas City, Kansas: City of
Kansas City, 1976.

Kansas City Star, 5/14/1915, 11/2/1938, 2/21/1974.

Kemper, Harvey H. "History of Washington Township and your
school District." circa 1960.

Scott, Mrs. Harry, Sr., Mrs. J.M. Slaughter and Miss Mae
Pennington, compilers and editors. History of 120 years
about the Hickman Mills Community Christian Church.
Hickman Mills, Missouri: Rhoadschnellpresse, Inc., 1965.

Unidentified clipping, post-1957, attributing the 1931 Ruskin
High School to Owen, Sayler and Payson.

Western Contractor, 1/25/1911 (p. 7), 7/29/1908 (p. 6),
3/17/1909 (p. 10), 7/27/1916 (p. 7), 10/11/1916 (p. 7).

Prepared by Kathryn A. Burns
Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural statement: Rockford School is a small, brick structure typical of the one and two room schoolhouses built in the United States around the turn of the century. The decorative brick details of Rockford and its sister schools are some of the notable features.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The L-shaped building, one-story with basement, is 70'9" by 34'3".
2. Foundations: The foundations are of stone, roughly laid.
3. Wall construction, finish, color: The walls are of red, textured brick with red stained mortar joints laid in a common bond. There is a decorative bond at the water table and cornice. Large panels on the east and south facades are set off by one-inch projecting brick frames.
4. Structural system, framing: The north wall, the interior east-west wall, and the north part of the east wall are structural clay tile. The remaining exterior walls are brick.
5. Porches: The front (east) porch is 9'6" by 4'6" with concrete floor and steps, seven risers, and an iron railing. The back (west) porch has eight steps leading down to the basement, a concrete retaining wall, and an iron railing.
6. Chimneys: There is one brick exterior chimney at the center of the west facade.
7. Openings: All openings are surrounded by one-inch projecting brick trim and the frames are dark brown.

- a. Doorways and doors: The front (east) doorway has double paneled doors with six lights each and a seven-light transom above. The opening measures 5'3" by 9'5". The west door to the basement has a similar paneled door with four lights in the upper half. The opening measures 3'1" by 8'.
- b. On each of the three elevations of the east (front) section, there is a 3'3" square window with six lights. The east facade also has two double windows. One is a small, 5'2" by 3'8" casement, the other a large, 6'6" by 6'9" double window with double-hung sashes and six-over-one lights. The west elevation has two long banks of windows, each with six windows which have eight-over-one lights and double-hung sashes. The basement has seven three-light casements and one two-light casement. Also in the basement are three openings to the crawl space under the addition. Each of the three gables has an elliptical window in the peak.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof has two intersecting gables covered with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The raking cornice curves where it meets the horizontal cornice, and there is a bed molding under the eaves.
9. Sign: "Rockford School 1916" is lettered on the plaque in the front (east) gable.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement consists of a classroom and a furnace room on the west side of the building. Storage areas are located under the two interior stairs and front (east) porch. Two small bathrooms are located in the northeast corner. The space under the addition was left unexcavated.
- b. First floor: The first floor has two large classrooms along the back (west) side of the building. The sliding doors of a small coat closet in the south classroom have

been secured up into the wall and are no longer operable. Another coat room and a library complete the first floor.

2. Stairways: Two stairways lead from front hall down to basement. There are several single steps and slopes in the basement.
3. Flooring: The basement floor is concrete and the first floor is hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The first floor walls and ceilings are finished in stucco over wood lath, with the exception of the south classroom ceiling, which has sheetrock and batten strips. The basement has a dry wall ceiling and painted stone and brick walls.
5. Doors and doorways: The doors leading into the north classroom are double doors with a transom, similar to the front exterior doors. The doors from the north classroom to the library are double bi-fold doors. The remaining doors are paneled wood.
6. Decorative features: There is a cornice molding on the first floor.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating/air conditioning: The building is heated and cooled by a modern forced air unit.
 - b. Electrical: The electrical system is modern.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The front (east) elevation faces Raytown Road. The building sits in the northwest corner of a 270' by 130' lot with a semi-circular drive in front.

Prepared by Bethanie C. Grashof
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings
Survey
September, 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Longview Farm Survey was undertaken in 1978 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Kansas City District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of the Longview Dam and Reservoir. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was prepared on site by Project Supervisor Bethanie Grashof (HABS Office); Historian Kathryn A. Burns (George Washington University); Foreman Darl Rastorfer (University of Pennsylvania); and student architects Kimberly I. Merkel (University of Virginia), Leonida Cubellis (Syracuse University), Jeffrey M. Laufer (Temple University), Barney H. Silver (University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee), and Douglas R. Taylor (Auburn University). Work on the drawings was continued in the HABS office by Ms. Grashof and Peter Darlow (McGill University), and completed by Mr. Taylor in 1979. The data was edited in the HABS office in 1979 by Alison K. Hoagland (George Washington University).